Wars of Mobility

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Abstract
In the aftermath of 9/11, world leaders addressed the nation as a body under threat and hastened in new policies to bolster border protection and ‘securitize’ immigration. While the terrorist attacks cast new forms of public attention on the risks posed by mobile agents, the link between national security and regulating migration has always been at the forefront of the constitution of the nation state. Despite this persistent anxiety towards the social impact of migration and the status of people on the move, a more general understanding of mobility is not only missing in public debates, but has been a lacunae in the social sciences. What is mobility – a state, a force, a set of shifting co-ordinates? How does the definition of mobility shape social attitudes and personal experiences? This article examines the use of organic and mechanistic metaphors that have underpinned the classical paradigm for understanding of mobility in the social sciences. It argues that the global patterns of migration and the contemporary forms of hybrid subjectivity do not fit well with this paradigm. The limits and kinetophobic associations generated by the classical paradigm are examined through Harald Kleinschmidt’s theory of residentialism. The final part of this article outlines an alternative conceptual frame that is based on key terms from complexity theory.

Keywords
body and machine metaphors, complexity, global migration, mobility

Mobility and the Integrity of Bodies and Machines
Since the late nineteenth century most of the social and political discourse on migration has followed the core assumptions of nationalist ideologies that defined sovereign states...
as comprising a population that was both settled within a defined territory and in possession of a unique cultural identity. This viewpoint was also premised on a metaphysical claim that the abandonment of a nomadic lifestyle for fixed settlement was a developmental stage in human evolution. It was also framed by a mechanistic understanding of the negative relationship between movement and equilibrium: human movement was thereby seen as a depletion of energy as well as a threat to the integrity of borders and the stability of social entities. Hence, migration was considered a deviation from the normal conventions of settled life, and the migrants (or as Oscar Handlin termed them, the ‘uprooted’, 1951), were at best seen as the victims of external forces, or at worst perceived as suspect characters who sought unfair advantage over the residents and posed a threat to the prevailing social order. This tendency is also evident in sociological accounts on migration that express overt sympathy for the needs of migrants, but then describe them as ‘people with problems’ (Martin, 1978: 209). Even when migration has been acknowledged as a crucial feature of modernization, it was usually framed as if this process was finite, and adjustment was a mere transitional phase. The recent efforts to raise the height of the US-Mexican wall and defend ‘Fortress Europe’, while perpetuating the fantasy of self-preservation by fortifying the border, merely result in the use of higher ladders and more sophisticated tunnelling techniques (Harding, 2001; Huspeck, 2001). Within this paradigm the ‘problem with migrants’ has always been cast in terms of the challenge to either convert them into national citizens, or keep them out. Given these negative assumptions on the effects of migration and the status of migrants, it comes as no surprise that the public debates have tended to focus on the degree, rather than the legitimacy, of the imposition of limitations on immigration, restrictions on political entitlement, and the subjection of migrants to additional tests in relation to their biological and cultural fitness.

This negative view on migration is related to a deeper ambivalence towards mobility. Kinetophobia, the fear of mobility, takes many forms. It is most apparent in racist scapegoating, where the cause of social upheaval is projected upon the most vulnerable agents of movement. However, it also appears in the more pervasive and almost invisible oxymorons – ‘political body’ and ‘social engine’ – that shape everyday life. In this article I will argue that the mechanical and organic metaphors that are used to represent social forms are embedded within a kinetophobic worldview. In political philosophy there is the common metaphor of the political body as if it had three key parts – a head that commands, arms that fight battles, and organs that fulfil specific functions (Cheah, 2003). The Roman Senate was popularly referred to as the head, while the subordinate plebeians were the limbs. This division between command and obedience, intellectual and manual, persisted throughout the medieval and modern structures of religious, military and economic organization. Even the struggle between the Papal and Regal authority was fought in bodily metaphors. If Christ’s representative was the spiritual head, then the King was to be relocated into the midst of the chest, as the heart. In the modern period, the rise of new economic models tried to reconcile the tension between a seemingly endless chain of mechanical production, and the need to replenish what Adam Smith called the ‘toiling body’. Mark Seltzer (1992) has argued that in a number of disciplines, ranging from political-economy to literature, a new body-machine complex was constructed to represent the modern flows of power.
Most of the dispute within political theory has not revolved around the validity of this metaphor, but has focused on either the hierarchal position of the head or the heart in relation to the rest of the body. The absolutist traditions equated the sovereign with the will of God, elevating the head slightly above the rest of the body, whereas the republicans defined the sovereign through a negotiated social contract, and so the head was submerged in the body (Le Goff, 1989). The discovery of the body’s circulation system not only served as a model that encouraged people to think that clean blood cells and a well-regulated circulatory system were not just as a sign of somatic health and purity, but also provided a set of normative values on the necessary conditions for social order and security. Co-terminously, heightened bodily rhythms and foreign fluids also provided the imagery for invasive threats to the nation. These metaphors, which recount the combat between good and evil in terms of pure cells and dirty parasites, also articulate a new somatic ‘division of labour between executive and judicial and deliberative functions, along with an immune system that defends the body against outsiders, and a nervous system that communicates among its parts or members’ (Mitchell, 2008: 23). As Bryan Turner has argued: ‘Body metaphors illustrate the fact that we use the body as a convenient way of talking about the moral and political problems of society’ (2003: 1).

Images of the nation as a body under threat also recur in the populist media coverage and political debates on refugees (Tyler, 2006: 192). They were palpable in every utterance made by the former Australian Prime Minister when he launched his re-election campaign in 2001 with the slogan ‘we will decide who comes to this country’, and it even led to such ridiculous extremes as the planting of signs in remote beaches with a massive eye in the middle of the map of Australia. The sign was there to remind fishermen of the need to be ‘alert’ to the danger of refugees surfing ashore. Perhaps this vision of the vulnerable body was most vividly expressed in The Sun’s headline of the threat that already lurked in the nation’s migrant underbelly: ‘Britain is now a Trojan horse for terrorism’ (Renton, 2003: 75). Such body metaphors are used as a kind of map that symbolically visualizes the integrity of the state by comparing it to a unified body, and constructs the migrant as an enemy agent.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, social scientists, in particular those who adopted the functionalist approach, turned away from body metaphors and began comparing society to an engine. Inputs and outputs, forces and levers, gears and cogs, fuels and lubricants became the key terms not only for evoking social relations and tendencies, but also setting the parameters for the ‘normal’ function of society. Ford’s dream of a ceaseless conveyor belt that ensured the constant flow of steel from the mines, factory, showrooms and onto the streets, his belief that automatons work best when blind, and his classification of humanity as being made up of a few heads and many hands, is the most insistent version of the modernist romance of bodies as machines.

At the core of the mechanistic model of society is a general theory of equilibrium. Scientific theories on energy flows had a profound influence on the cultural and political frameworks of modernity. The first law of thermodynamics, which proposed the existence of a singular system of universal energy that was both finite and indestructible, was seized upon with particular zeal by both liberal reformists and utopian socialists. This belief that energy flows could be accelerated and converted to maximize production inspired new visions of progress. The human body, and society as a whole, were
constantly compared to an engine. It was, and in many ways still is, popularly accepted, that both the body and the social system were composed of parts that could be fuelled to move at different speeds, or modified to have greater flexibility, and that the overall stability would be ensured through the greater co-ordination of the structure and tightening of the boundary. The social parts were not just described as being part of a whole, but the idea of a whole both determined the limits and prescribed how the parts fit together. Exorbitant bits and dissipative forces that threatened the internal equilibrium were either shaved off or sealed up. Meanwhile the engine filtered inputs to eliminate impurities and was fortified against external shocks (Rabinbach, 1990).

Metaphors of Mobility in Migration Studies

This mechanistic model of mobility also provides the key conceptual framework that binds together the two dominant perspectives on international migration: macro-structural and micro-agency. Macro-social theorists have mapped the flows of migrants according to the fluctuations between supply and demand that establish equilibrium in the economy. According to this perspective, it is argued that in times of economic expansion in the centre there is a need for additional sources of labour. Migrants come from the peripheries, but they enter on a differential status. They assume a position that Marx compared to the ‘reserve army’. When the economy contracts, then the supply of migrants is either constricted, or withdrawn from the labour market. This model relies on the integration of the spatial polarities of centre/periphery into a global system that allows migration to flow as a consequence of structural changes in the economy. The sources of migrants may be drawn from sites that are linked by historical patterns of migration, however, the actual flows are controlled by an interplay between structural needs and institutional regulations for entry and exit. The flows are thereby depicted as if there was a system of pipelines and taps that connect the centre and the periphery. The power of the centre is measured by its capacity to control the flow. This model draws on the mechanistic assumption that contrary forces can balance out, and that, while power is concentrated by gathering the surplus energy from the periphery, equilibrium will be maintained by regulating flow. As a model, which emphasized the compensatory dynamic between push and pull factors, and stressed the function of chains and pipelines for conducting movement, it was perfectly suited to the industrial age. It classified human energy and trajectory according to the language of mechanization.

Liberal neo-classical economic commentators have always rejected the centrality of structural factors and favoured a micro-model that focuses the energy of migration flows on individual preferences. However, this perspective also draws on a mechanistic theory of flow. While they recoil from Marx’s militaristic metaphors of appropriation and exploitation, there is an underlying presumption that movement is a result of an individual decision to pursue economic opportunity, and in some extreme cases, the collective pattern of individual movements are represented as if they were driven by the forces that operate within a magnetic field. Migrants from densely populated areas with low incomes are meant to be attracted to sparse areas with high-income opportunities. This voluntarist model focuses on individual choices and is most vividly represented in the metaphor of ‘chain migration’. It assumes that individuals not only have the capacity
to determine whether conditions are favourable for them but also induce others to follow in their steps. There is also the assumption that in times of economic downturn the migrants will be the first to move on, which would then confirm the optimistic belief that migration maintains equilibrium in the market place.

Underpinning both the macro and micro model is a set of causal assumptions and linear trajectories. I have argued previously that the Marxist versions of the macro-model exaggerate the determining role of structural forces, and the forms of agency in the liberal micro-model are over-simplified (Papastergiadis, 2000: 30–7). There are many fundamental questions that the conventional macro and micro models fail to explain. Why do so many people who could gain an economic benefit from moving actually refuse to leave their home? Why are so many of the world’s migrants drawn from such few places? The unevenness in the distribution of the volume in global migration is a genuine puzzle. Thomas Faist’s response to these paradoxes is intriguing. He is not satisfied by minor conceptual adjustments, such as the incorporation of mechanistic terms like ‘stress threshold’ that can address both the tension generated by sudden movement, and the need to allow for flexibility within the overall social equilibrium. Migration is, in his eyes, not just a relief mechanism, rather, it is a powerful social force. To address these complexities Faist postulates a sophisticated version of meso-structural theory. In this stratum there is a network that links both broad structures and individual preferences, thereby facilitating the traffic between specific places. This relational approach is encapsulated in this crucial and complex sentence in which he stresses that: ‘social capital is mainly a local asset; but it can turn into a transmission belt when it crystallizes in migrant networks’ (2009: 29, italics mine). I am struck by the disjunctive combination of both mechanistic and organic metaphors, in Faist’s explanation. It is not a mere semantic slip-page but a reflection of both the complexity of the migratory process and the necessity to graft different concepts that can track the process by which levers slip into nodes, and bases become networks. This mixing of metaphors is not necessarily a sign of confusion, but expressive of the complexity in the linkages and flows of global migration.

Social scientists have conceded that there is no single model, or ‘grand theory’ that can explain the complexity of global mobility (Portes, 2000), and philosophers now argue that the body politic ‘is no longer an enclosed nucleus of identity’ (Grosz, 1994: 103). However, there is a still a general failure, especially in the social sciences, to reflect on the meaning of mobility and deconstruct the mechanistic frameworks within which migration theories are embedded. The concepts of ‘reserve army’ and ‘chain migration’ rely on a boundary in economic production that barely exists today. In the age of outsourcing, who is ‘outside’? – and when flexibility saturates the workplace, expend-ability is not confined to the margins. The micro, meso and macro models have all presupposed that migration patterns are driven by the laws of equilibrium. The explanations of exchange and movement may vary by giving particular stress to either individual choice or economic structures, yet they invariably rely on the transpersonal system of the ‘self-regulating’ market. The invisible hand of the market always ensures that gains and losses balance out. Such myths defy history and confound politics. No system works so neatly. Although migration theorists have tended to expose the machinations for exploiting and discriminating against migrants, they have also tended to validate the migration process on a cost/benefit balance sheet. However, even these affirmative
approaches have done little to develop new methodological approaches or consider mobility as an object of study (Hannam et al., 2006: 1–2).

**Mapping Global Patterns**

Migrants move because they are already in the spirit of modernity. They are not passive entities being pushed and pulled along the world’s great imaginary pipelines. They may leave home with the intention of returning, but along the way the experience of their journey alters their priorities. They often go back and forth, sometimes checking where to settle and where to work. In this criss-crossing, the causes and consequences of migration overlap. Migration studies, which divide the process into the determinant forces of movement and consequent mechanisms for incorporation, invariably overlook this complex feedback system. The classical theories of migration simply fail to explain why migrants concentrate in the already overcrowded and guarded metropolises of the north, or in the words of Hardt and Negri, how they manage to ‘roll up-hill’ (2000). I will now present a brief characterization of the volumes and trajectories of global mobility, as well as examining the subject positions that migrants adopt, the spatial affiliations and institutional forces that shape contemporary migration.

**Increased Numbers of People on the Move**

Today there are more migrants and refugees than at any other point in history. Between the two world wars, the numbers of migrants doubled. By 1965, it had grown to 75 million migrants. In 2002, it was estimated that there were 175 million migrants worldwide and by 2005, it had already risen to 200 million. Between 1970 and 1990, the number of countries classified by the ILO as receiving migrants nearly doubled, and similarly, the countries that supplied substantial numbers of migrants rose from 39 to 67 (Stalker, 2000). According to the most recent UNHCR report, there are over 51 million internally displaced and stateless people as well as 16 million refugees. The United States continues to have the highest number of immigrants, but in proportionate terms the heaviest weighting of migrants and refugees are landing in select parts of Africa, Pakistan, Syria and Iran. In overall terms, most migrants are living in the South. While public debates in the West repeatedly express fear of being ‘flooded’ by refugees, this sentiment overlooks the fact that most refugees flee to neighbouring countries and that on average between 83–90 per cent remain within the region of their origin.

**Multiplicity of Directions**

‘Go West’ is not the iconic sign of contemporary migration. The classical perception of migration as a finite journey has also been displaced by a more complex range of patterns, which includes seasonal, itinerant, recurrent and incessant movements. Migrants are not heading in any single direction (Stalker, 2000). Nor is there a structural force that governs the majority of movements. Contemporary flows of migration are multiple and they differ from the earlier waves of migration which were characterized as being generated by the semi-structured push–pull dynamic of the colonization of the New World.
by Europeans, or the recruitment of workers into the industrial centres of the North. Today there is no singular set of co-ordinates that is pulling the major flows. People are on the move in multiple and circular directions. Labour migration is heading towards not only developed but also developing countries. For instance, while Asia has disproportionately low levels of international migration, it is experiencing some of the most complex patterns of movement. While the European Union is now overtaking North America as the primary destination in the West, the points of entry and sites of concentration are occurring in the less ‘developed’ parts of Southern Europe. Mapping these turbulent movements defies the conventional polarities of ‘cartographic reason’, and has resulted in the production of new continuously updated ‘interactive maps (amn i-Map)’ (Mezzadra, 2009). These maps no longer seek to plot movements as if they either followed fixed spatial markers such as roads, or were directed by regulated forms of institutional channels. On the contrary, the maps are reliant on the latest input of surveillance agents and border patrols that are tracking migrants, who themselves are changing directions as soon as a specific route is closed by border patrols. There are also counter-surveillance maps that are issued by activist and artist groups that in turn alert migrants to the blockages and movements generated by border patrols. The feedback of these mapping exercises and counter-movements produces an image of chaotic motion that is both labyrinthine in appearance but also highly contingent. Aggressive surveillance and interception techniques are thereby not only causing migrants to shift the points of access across jagged borderlines, but also resulting in the adoption of dangerous and circuitous sea journeys, or new land routes that proceed towards their intended destination via the less regulated ‘third’ territories. These transit zones become so entangled as servicing centres and way stations that they eventually become a ‘proxy’ destination.

Diversification of Migrants

The classical sociological image of the migrant as an uprooted, lonely and impoverished man is not representative of the diverse types of people who are now on the move. While the classical image of the migrant was dominated by the psycho-social type known as the ‘marginal man’, it also included a more ambivalent figure that Simmel and Schütz sketched out as the ‘stranger’. The image of the stranger opened a more positive form of identification as it suggested that migration was responsible for a broadening of cultural horizons and the introduction of critical perspectives. By contrast, the contemporary figure of the migrant is loaded with stigmatic associations of criminality, exploitation and desperation. In reality, men from all classes and status groups, and growing numbers of educated women, are on the move across the world. The vast majority of Indian migrants leave home with tertiary qualifications. In the Philippines, the second largest ‘exporter of labour in the world’, not only do the number of women migrants vastly exceed the men, but their remittances have prevented the national economy from total collapse (Go, 1998: 147). The recent studies on the feminization of migration have shown that women have not simply followed men’s footsteps but have pioneered new journeys and patterns of circulation (Anthias and Lazardis, 2000). The UNHCR has noted that of all the people that they oversee, 47 per cent are women and 44 per cent are under the age of 18. These people are not easily classified into discrete
categories such as economic migrants and political refugees. People who flee from violent societies also tend to be the victims of collapsed social orders that are the result of the global economy bypassing whole regions (Duffield, 2001). As the distinction between political or religious persecution, systematic discrimination and structural disadvantage starts to blur, more and more commentators are calling for a fundamental redrafting of the 1951 UN Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. In this complex world there is now a multitude of factors that force people to be on the move, and there are a range of new terms, such as ‘transmigrant’, or ‘transilience’, that once were applied to mobile elites, but are now just as relevant to a wide range of people who have the capacity to move and live in and between different countries (Richmond, 2002: 712).

**Complex Forms of Agency and Spatial Affiliation**

Regular commuting and communing across distant places have led to the creation of new forms of cross-border economic, political and cultural exchanges. While some diasporic communities remain relatively fixed in their adopted homeland, they also channel their media services through new satellite networks (Bailey et al., 2007). These triangulated media delivery systems that hop across vast horizontal distances also twist the proximate forms of day-to-day intimacies. The contemporary patterns of cross-cultural interaction include both complex forms of hybridization and jagged segmentations that do not easily fit into the categories of either an aggressive assimilationism, or even the emergent forms of multiculturalism. Diasporic communities are becoming more self-directive and bifurcate as they engage with dominant structures and utilize new communication technologies. Transformations in the methods of production and the dissemination of global commodities are also undermining traditional forms of spatial attachment. The media industries and dispersal of consumer commodities now also serve as strange attractors. In this context the North is consistently emitting contradictory signals: encouraging the illusion of freedom and mobility, promoting its own commodities and values, while also restricting human migration and devaluing other traditions. Despite the contradiction between the rhetoric of global connectedness and the practice of exclusionary policies on immigration, complex migration networks are constantly emerging. While most forms of migration occur across relatively small distances, such as the route from Burma to Thailand, the changes in communication networks and the use of the airplane for mass transportation have also transformed the relationships to space and place. As a consequence, members from closely-knit rural communities in China can find passageways into receptive enclaves in New York. Information networks between friends and families now create a sense of adjacency between places that are separated by vast distances. Migrants thereby choose their destination according to personal knowledge and available transportation systems rather than by geographic proximities (Massey et al., 1998: 12). As many commentators have observed, the capacity of migrants to adapt to the new ‘liquid’ social structures, gives the impression that they are spearheading the broader social transformation from the ‘space of places’ into ‘spaces of flow’ (Bauman, 2005).
Governance and Transnational Flows

In the past decade, many of the nation states, that have large diasporas spread across the world, have started to implement policies that create economic, political and social mechanisms that enable migrants to participate in the national development process from afar (Levitt and de la Dehesa, 2003: 588). These new policies not only facilitate more efficient means for transferring money, but also encourage higher levels of political involvement and cultural exchange. This has led some commentators to observe that the rise of these transnational networks is reconfiguring the sovereignty of the state (Appadurai, 1996). Immigration and refugee policies have also undergone dramatic changes since the 1970s. In 1976, the UN calculated that only a small minority of countries had policies to lower immigration and this was matched by a slightly larger number of countries that were seeking to raise levels of immigration. By 2001, almost one quarter of all countries viewed immigration levels as too high, and almost half of all developed countries were introducing more restrictive policies. Canada and Australia, two of the classic destinations of permanent migration, now offer a wide variety of visas, as a response to the fact that the number of temporary residents and demand for business visitors exceeds permanent settlers. This ‘managerial approach’ first began to emerge in the early 1990s whereby the states’ migration policies, on the one hand, placed greater onus on normative requirements such as stricter citizenship tests, created new temporary residence visas for refugees with probationary conditions and restricted the rights for asylum seekers, and on the other hand, in order to be able to attract highly skilled migrants, it has also granted new business visas on a more contractual basis (Kofman, 2005: 453–67). In other parts of the world, the dismantling of official migration recruiting agencies, deregulation in the market place and the increased restrictions on asylum policies have collectively spawned new informal and illegal networks for smuggling people across borders. In the absence of proximate and secure institutional spaces for the processing of asylum claims, legitimate refugees are increasingly reliant on traffickers to organize their escape, transition and entry into a safe country. The sanctions on airline carriers and employers, the adoption of the safe country of origin and safe third country principles, and the introduction of a new range of detention and deportation practices have not stemmed these flows. ‘Snakeheads’ in China, ‘coyotes’ in Mexico and the new Russian mafia are creating their own illegal trafficking networks of migrants and developing a trade in sex slaves which is now calculated as being as lucrative as the sale of drugs and arms. As one pimp boasted, drugs and guns can only be sold once (Pope, 1997: 38). These traffickers are well informed of legal loopholes and follow the most effective routes. They are highly mobile and operate through transnational networks. The widespread reporting on human trafficking and in particular some gruesome cases of sex slaves prompted the UN Commission for the Prevention of Crime and Penal Justice to develop a definition of trafficking. While this was a welcome addition to international law, as one commentator observed, the concept reinscribed a gendered distinction and once again conflated migrant with victim (Agustin, 2006: 42). The ‘data vacuum’ on irregular migration, the ‘fluid character of irregular migrants’, the regulative void that sits between the national and the global, and the tension between citizenship rights and human rights have meant that much of the public debate on this issue has been dominated...
by unfounded generalizations (Grant, 2006: 17). Despite the promotion of arguments by
the UNHCR, GCIM, and IOM that migration is a global issue, there is still no single reg-
ulative authority. Hence, these transnational institutions do not even have the power to
enforce states to uphold laws and conventions to which they are already signatories. This
tension in the regulative procedure has only heightened the contradictions in the
migration process: restrictive national policies have in effect exposed migrants to
criminal networks, encouraged a higher rate of asylum, while also fanning populist fears
of cross-border movements and avoiding the long-term consequences of migration.

This brief outline of the scale and diversity in trajectory, as well as the forms of
agency, modes of communal living and relation to institutional forces, reveals levels
of interconnection that are rarely registered in public debates. Two factors continue to
dominate public perceptions of migrants: the need for control and the calculation of ben-
efit. In recent times, Jagdish Bhagwati has wryly noted that the ‘ability to control migra-
tion has shrunk as the desire to do so has increased’ (2003: 98). This fear that migration is
now out of control is compounded by the paranoid assumption that migrants will ‘steal’
our way of life.11 While there is now considerable historical evidence and economic data
that demonstrate the dynamic role played by migrants, these ‘facts’ never seem to shift
the kinetophobic values and attitudes.12 Even anti-racist activists and migration experts
often fail to pick up the implicit linkage between stigmatic claims against migrants and
the inherent ambivalence towards mobility in the broader cultural frameworks for repre-
senting belonging.

Residentialism and Kinetophobia

The fear of migrants is not unique to modernity. While populist media commentators and
politicians commonly blur the identity of the migrant with a figure of external threat, and
treat migration as the temporary disruption to the timeless feeling of national belonging,
these images are the opposite from historical reality. One of the main obstacles in under-
standing the complexity of flows that shape contemporary forms of belonging is the
prevalence of state-centric paradigms in the social sciences. As Harald Kleinschmidt
observed, information ends at the borders of the state. Empirical studies of migration
tend to focus on the national impact, such as the cost of accommodating refugees, or the
assets that are transferred by migrants. This data presupposes that the cost/benefit anal-
ysis can be measured at the original point of entry, and it rarely addresses the complex
mobilities and historical patterns of transnational forms of spatial co-habitation. Borders
are represented as discrete lines that separate entities, and yet identities are never as
clear-cut as this image suggests. The social sciences and the humanities tended to assume
that the nation state was the basic unit for geo-political affiliation, socio-economic orga-
nization and cultural attachment. This residentialist bias not only treated the idea of a
stable place and unified identity as the natural state of human social existence, but also
defined the migrant condition in a negative light. By describing the desire to have roots
in one place as fundamental human need, projecting mobility as the cause of moral dis-
order, and equating the places of mobility with non-places, social scientists have not only
entrenched a kinetophobic view towards migrants, but also underestimated the social
value of mobility (Cresswell, 2006).
Borders are usually ‘fuzzy’ at their edges and people find ways not only to connect with others, but they often live in frontier zones that do not correspond to national categories. These state-centric paradigms perpetuate the ideal of citizenship as a bounded subject. However, as Kleinschmidt reminds us, neither the territorialized social structures associated with nationalism, nor the stigmatic attitudes towards migrants are a constant feature in human history. Hence, Kleinschmidt’s critique of the concept of residentialism in nationalist ideologies sets out to reverse the assumption that migration is a disruption to the normal process of settlement, and that migrants are either displaced people in need of re-settlement, or dangerous agents that require scrutiny. He then proposes the adoption of an affirmative perspective on the individual narratives and decisions taken by migrants that highlight both their positive function as bridge-builders, and their dynamic utilization of mobility. To move beyond this kinetophobic worldview requires not just the incorporation of multicultural policies of social inclusion so that the nation state can finally come good on its integrative promises, but a more fundamental critique of the narratives that situated political rights and cultural affiliation within territorial borders.

After 9/11, the moral panic over mobility led some commentators to conclude that we were heading towards a new global apartheid. There was the fear that while globalization was transforming commerce, and creating a new nexus between commuting and communication, this was not matched by any commensurate and sustainable form of global ‘moral connectedness’ (Szerszynski and Urry, 2002: 471). These fears reinscribe the fantasy of preservation through fortification, and equate the logic of mobility with the destabilizing effects of globalization. The now vast literature on globalization consistently touches on the process of mobility as a dynamic force in contemporary society, and acknowledges that the forms of subjectivity, structures of spatial attachments, and institutions for regulating cross-border flows have also altered. However, as Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos (2008) have also argued, this discourse has not necessarily displaced the fantasy of border control. For instance, they characterize the European policies on migration that continue to direct funds towards the militarization of border control, the development of new transnational data banks, the implementation of stealth surveillance techniques, the construction of temporary camps, the use of off-shore processing centres, and the forging of treaties that legalize the ‘transfer’ of migrants to safe third countries, as efforts that promote the illusion of ‘Fortress Europe’ and mask the more complex reality of flow and porosity. Their conception of the migration process as an evolving network of trajectories that pass through liminal porocratic institutions highlights the need to develop an alternative framework that can attend to the multi-directional patterns of global migration and the constant interplay between mobility and borders.

John Urry (2007) also promotes the need for a new mobility paradigm within which scholars can investigate the issues regarding displacement and settlement, networking and conviviality, as well as the effects produced by new communication and practices. This new mobility paradigm will need to overcome the methodological limitations of the state-centric views on belonging, and thereby refute the residentialist claims on social evolution. Recent advances in the sociology of migration and multi-sited ethnographies have already shown both a finer appreciation of the complex feedback systems that
arise from relationships that are formed across borders, and an affirmative valuation of
the impact of mobility on social structures, cultural formations and personal experiences
(Marcus, 1998; Hannam et al., 2006; Urry, 2003). From this perspective, migration is
now seen as a dynamic and constitutive feature of social life. Similarly, migrants are
no longer typecast as either passive victims that are ‘pushed and pulled’ by external
forces, or deviants that threaten social order. It is therefore more appropriate to consider
the way migrants plot their journeys and utilize extensive networks of information as part
of the normal and conscientious efforts by which people dignify their lives. In Hardt and
Negri’s (2000) spirited defence of a new form of critical agency, migrants are pioneers of
what they call the ‘multitude’ and, as Kleinschmidt argues, the new discourse on migra-
tion has the potential to extend the notion of citizenship to ‘universalistic principles
of human rights irrespective of loyalty to a particular institution of statehood’ (2006:
65). As Saskia Sassen (2006) argues, this tension between formal and substantive rights
has the potential to either shrink or expand the terrain upon which social and citizenship
issues are articulated. In order to capture the possibilities that arise from this tension, I
am proposing that we not only debunk the old passions that objectify the other, correct
the cost/benefit evaluations of the migratory process, but also develop a new conceptual
understanding of the interplay between mobility and belonging.

Mobility and Complex Systems

As I write, the world’s largest scientific experiment has commenced its search for the
origins and proof of the existence of dark matter.16 The experiment involves the collision
of particles at the near speed of light. Will the collision reveal the origins of matter after
the big bang, or open new questions of time, space and movement? What is now clear is that
the classical theories of equilibrium and entropy are no longer the ‘natural’ explanations
for what makes things move. For Aristotle, the natural state of things was rest. Movement
was the fulfilment of a potential that was already in an object. Galileo reversed the rela-
tionship and claimed movement as the norm. Newton subsequently proposed a model
of mechanics in which movement was reduced to the interplay between a fixed entity and
external forces (Cresswell, 2006). According to Newton’s theory, movement is governed
by the deterministic laws of external causes and effects. Hence, as matter expends energy
in movement, it also proceeds towards entropy. However, with quantum theory and the
discovery of the ‘relational patterning’ that is formed by motion, Bohm argued that matter
gains mass through the interactions that occur in movement. Scientists thus overturned the
long-standing assumption that energy is always depleted and matter diminished as a
consequence of movement and reopened thinking on the relationship between matter and
movement. The most recent theories of complex systems have gone so far as to claim that
survival requires mobility. Capra claims that all matter is constantly involved in a process
that includes the drawing up of semi-porous boundaries, interacting with proximate
neighbours, developing responses that accelerate exchange or provide resistance, weaving
into clustered networks and producing feedback effects that mutually transform itself
and their environment (Capra, 1996). In this system mere equilibrium equals death. Or to
put it more affirmatively, it is through mobility and interaction that we discover novelty
and creativity (Prigogine and Stengers, 1997).
According to complexity theory, difference is not a problem that is in need of either segregation or integration. This starting point signals a departure from the dualism between matter and motion, and the oppositional logic that dominated the mechanistic models of social transformation. Complexity theory gives us a new way of thinking about difference and motion. In this model, difference does not threaten identity, and mobility does not exhaust energy. If we were to re-think social and cultural transformation through this interactive model, then it would open new possibilities of thinking about the constitutive relationship between difference and identity, as well as allow us to consider the idea that movement is an intrinsic part of belonging, and vice versa.

However, before giving the impression that complexity theory is a new scientific model that, like its predecessors can become a map to explain the totality of social relations, it is worth stressing that so far, in the social sciences it has only been used as a new tool kit – a set of metaphors and concepts (Urry, 2003: 120). James Rosenau, one of the most enthusiastic and astute users of complex theory, is also cautious as he notes that there is still a sense that the vocabulary and techniques for representing social change are lagging behind the dynamism that has exploded from the major events of our time. While Rosenau warns that complexity theory cannot predict the trajectory of change, he also maintains that it produces a more optimistic view towards mobility and difference, as it is tuned to find creative links between order and disorder (2003: 212). The link between the two remains vital, because disorder is not defined as the oppositional term of anti-order, but in the more open-ended sense of not-order (Hayles, 1991).

In this perspective, complexity can be seen as an operational modality that is neither totally ordered nor tumbling from one random encounter to the next. It refers to a process of relational interaction that exists between and within the ‘closed’ space of structure and the ‘open’ spaces of chance. Flows occur and shapes emerge through a network of circulation and modification. The effect of these flows is unpredictable. A singular action can have multiple effects in different parts of the system. At some point it can proceed in an incremental manner, at other points, it will link up with other effects and cascade away from its intended path. As it has often been stated, a complex system is non-linear. This means that there is no proportionality between cause and effect. ‘Outcomes are determined not by single causes but by multiple causes, and these causes may, and usually do, interact in a non-additive fashion. In other words, the combined effect is not necessarily the sum of its parts’ (Byrne, 1998: 20).

This shift in scientific perspective has dramatic consequences for the way we understand the integrity of a social system and the risks or benefits of human movement. For over a century social scientists and legislators have relied on a discourse that understood social change and human movement in the light of a mechanistic worldview. Throughout modernity, sociologists, even powerful critics of positivism like Sorokin – who also warned against the adoption of organic metaphors to explain the processes of social change – were deeply committed to mechanical frameworks that defined the strength and vitality of a social system in relation to its capacity to consume and convert difference according to its own inner principles of unity and coherence. Any evidence of unreconciled syncretism or residual hybridity was interpreted as a sign that the social system was fragmenting. Difference was the social sign of decline (1992: 242–50). From this perspective, migrants were considered inferior to national citizens, migration was deemed...
a disruption to the normal condition of settlement, and cosmopolitanism was routinely referred to as mere cultural attitude and a romantic ideal reserved for rootless dilettantes. The new mobility paradigm unpicks these negative assumptions and seeks to affirm both the agency of the person in movement and the viability of attachments that are formed across boundaries. This fluid form of agency and social belonging has reignited the social and political debates on cosmopolitanism.

The German sociologist Ulrich Beck has stepped forward to argue that the interlinked and globalizing processes that are transforming all aspects of social organization and human consciousness now require a new perspective that addresses the cosmopolitanism that is already at the ‘heart of political imagination, action and organization’ (1999: 9). John Urry also shares the view that a new conceptual approach towards mobility and belonging is necessary in order to deal with ‘the intersecting sensuous relations of humans with diverse objects; the timed and spaced qualities of relations stretching across societal borders; and the complex and unpredictable intersections of many regions, networks and flows’ (2000: 15). However, what is still in a rather crude form is a conceptual framework for understanding how the interlinking of these global processes operates, what kinds of social effects they produce, and how they transform the structures of belonging. While there is no shortage of evidence of extensions in the modes and intensification of the effects of mobility, and greater calls for people to develop working practices that more adaptable to novelty, difference and change, then we have to ask, why have we been so slow in developing what is variously called ‘earth politics’ (Beck, 1999: 8), or ‘planetary consciousness’ (Gilroy, 2004)? What is holding us back from putting into practice this new discourse on human subjectivity and social bonding?

Complex systems theory could offer a third perspective on the turbulent mobilities that shape contemporary life. James Rosenau, for instance, does not seek to explain mobility as a consequence of individual choices, or even as the result of the interplay between individual actions and structural forces. Change is more complex. It emerges in and through the interaction between a range of vectors that he has identified as the reflexive patterns in decision-making, the shifting forms of knowledge, the cascading effects of new technologies, and the dialectic of both an integrative and fragmenting tension between national and global structures (1997: 55–78). This relational perspective could uncouple the kinetophobic associations between mobility and social change.

This perspective has radical implications for the way we understand global migration. It goes beyond the mechanistic paradigm of migration studies, because it does not simply search for new causal factors, or add more links between macro-structures and micro-networks, but proposes the view that mobility creates its own momentum, pathways and boundaries. For instance, the relationship between motivational factors, social networks and institutional forces that comprise the migration process can be re-defined as a complex adaptive system in which semi-autonomous agents break out of existing entities and link up in different formations. In this dynamic process of fragmentation and integration there is both an interruption of the old structures and the feedback generated by the journey transforms both the individual and their surroundings. There are no pre-existing structures, only shapes that are made by the constant process of flow. Routes taken by migrants are not to be confused with the paths that are the trace lines of mobility. Within this relational system, there are also pockets of consolidation and concentration.
However, even in these domains, where power may exert greater levels of influence, there is still a looping network of feedback and destabilization that does not necessarily lead to destruction, but inspires reflexive adjustments and modifications. If we were to re-imagine society as a complex system, then it is possible that the social status of mobility would go beyond the kinetophobic associations.

Notes

1. Grosz is speaking directly to the problematic identity of the body, and in place of a stable universal referent she proposes the idea of ‘flesh that is composed of the “leaves” of the body interspersed with the “leaves” of the world’. This idea of the flesh is utilized by Hardt and Negri to characterize the ‘multitude’ of social-political affiliations that now exist in the interactions between the local and the global (2000: 199–200). Spinoza’s idea of the body as a composite of infinitely smaller bodies, and its boundary being formed through constant recomposition provides the inspiration for both feminist and radical politics. For an account of Spinoza’s concept of the multitude – not as a political abstraction that refers to the unanimity of the people, but as a representation of the pulsating politics through which people form a dynamic mass, see Montag (1999: 62–89), and Balibar (1994: 3–38).


5. See, for instance, www.imap-migration.org. This map was developed in co-operation with the leading agencies involved in the surveillance of migration pathways, and it exists in two versions, one which is publicly available and another that ‘contains detailed information restricted to representatives of the partner states and partner agencies’. See http://www.icmpd.org/10.html.

6. By definition these maps circulate through clandestine networks and have restricted access. In 2002, Heath Bunting in collaboration with Kayle Brandon and commissioned by the Tate Gallery in London and the Musée d’Art Moderne in Luxembourg, developed a website in which he played the role of ‘coyote’. For a general discussion of the documents and guides to border crossing, see Cubitt (2008: 733–42). On the range of collective art projects that respond to the militarization of migration, see Biemann and Holmes (2006). See also a mapping of the migrants camps in Europe, available at: www.migreurop.org/ on http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOuFo5egBqE.

7. GCIM Report on http://www.gcim.org/en/finalreport.html. However, there is a broad consensus that the migration of professionals and the transfer of remittances tend to hamper development and entrench dependency in the countries of origin.

8. The flow of remittances to South Asian and Latin American economies is one of the major sources of revenue, and according to the Multilateral Investment Fund, the recent economic crisis in North America, Spain and Japan has also resulted in the first decline in the volume for over a decade.


10. A recent report on international trafficking estimated that between 800,000 to 900,000 people are forcibly moved across borders every year: ‘Global Trends’, Migration News 10(3) July 2003, 34.

12. Douglas Massey and J. Edward Taylor argue that in the USA there is a historical correlation between growth in trade and immigration, and also a correlation between the recent restrictions on immigration and the decline of rates of trade between the USA and the rest of the world (2004: 377). In the most recent British calculation, it has been estimated that migrants earn about 15 per cent more than their native-born counterparts, and while they contribute more to the government’s revenue, they are also less reliant on welfare and state support (Sriskandarajak et al., 2008). Murphy outlines the ways in which Australian public sentiment and political rhetoric on the suitable levels of migration have been at odds with economic models that account for the stimulant provided by migration (2000: 159).

13. This perspective extends the earlier postcolonial critiques of the ethnocentrism in nationalist ideologies and their positive evaluation of both hybrid subjectivity and cross-cultural flows (Faist, 2000: 189–222; Morley and Kuan-Hsing, 1996; Nestor Canclini, 1995; Ong, 1999; Papastergiadis, 1998).

14. For a more critical account of the limited impact of hybridity and diasporic theory on social and political policies, see Kalra et al. (2005:129).

15. Kleinschmidt’s critique of residentialism is almost identical to Liisa Malkki’s (1995) notion of sedentarist metaphysics which she argues was used to create fixed and territorial bounded forms of cultural identity.


**References**


**Bio**

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